Nicolas Collection

Finding Aid

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LINCOLN LIBRARY
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection at Allen County Public Library

*For additional material on Helen and John G. Nicolay, see the manuscript collection **Lincoln's Secretaries—Hay, Nicolay, Stoddard**; 1 box, 0.5 cubic feet.*
*For extensive correspondence between Helen Nicolay and others regarding a copy of the Gettysburg Address, see **Gettysburg Address Correspondence**; 1 box, 0.25 cubic feet.*

NICOLAY COLLECTION
6 boxes; 3.8 cubic feet

Biographical Notes

Helen Nicolay (1866-1954)

Helen Nicolay was born in 1866 to John G. Nicolay and Therena Bates Nicolay in Paris, where her father served as American Consul. In 1869, the Nicolay family returned to the United States. Helen's academic training was overseen by her father as well as private tutors. Little is known about Helen Nicolay as a young woman, other than that she helped her father and John Hay write their 10-volume Lincoln biography by taking dictation. She began writing her own books after her father's death in 1901 and had a summer retreat studio in New Hampshire she used for painting and writing. Her best known work is *Lincoln's Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay.* In all, she wrote more than 20 books, mostly history and biography, many of which were intended for children. She described her reason for writing in a letter to a young fan—she wrote books to make "history seem alive and interesting to young people."

Helen Nicolay was also a recognized artist. The Lincoln Museum Collection includes two oil paintings of John G. Nicolay painted by Helen Nicolay.

Helen Nicolay died in Washington, D.C., in 1954.

John G. Nicolay (1832-1901)

John G. Nicolay was born in Bavaria in 1832 and immigrated to the United States as child. In 1848, Nicolay became a printer's devil at the Pittsfield, Illinois, Whig newspaper, the *Free Press*. He eventually owned the paper and ran it successfully until he sold it in 1856. In 1857, having become a staunch Republican, he took a position as a clerk for Ozais Hatch, the Illinois Secretary of the State, in Springfield. It was there that Nicolay met Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln chose Nicolay to be his secretary immediately after Lincoln's nomination for presidency.[1]

Nicolay's relationship with John Hay developed while in Lincoln's employ. Nicolay had met the young Hay while Hay was at school in Pittsfield, and when mail became too much for Nicolay to handle at the White House, he requested Hay's assistance. Also while in Pittsfield, Nicolay met his future wife, Therena Bates.[2]

Lincoln entrusted Nicolay with more than secretarial duties, sending him to assist with Native American treaty negotiations. Nicolay, in turn, admired the president and zealously protected his reputation. In 1864, Nicolay went to Baltimore to oversee Lincoln's campaign for reelection.[3]

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[1] Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1982), 224.
[2] Neely, Jr., 224.
[3] Neely, Jr., 224.

Due to an uncomfortable relationship with Mary Todd Lincoln, who did not trust him, Nicolay requested a foreign position after Lincoln's reelection. Nicolay was preparing for his post as American consul in Paris when Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865. He remained in Washington to put the president's papers in order before assuming his duties in Paris. President Grant removed Nicolay from his foreign post in 1869 but appointed him Marshal to the United States Supreme Court in 1872.[4]

In 1874, with the permission of Robert Todd Lincoln, Nicolay and Hay began work on their monumental *Abraham Lincoln, a History*. Parts of the work were serialized in *Century Magazine* from 1886 to 1890, when the entire work was published in 10 volumes. Nicolay and Hay also published a 2-volume set of Lincoln's writings, and Nicolay was at work on a 1-volume version of *Abraham Lincoln, a History* when he died in 1901.[5]

Provenance

Upon the death of Helen Nicolay on September 12, 1954, her personal possessions went to her secretary and companion Fay Elizabeth Pierce Beij. When Beij died, also in 1954, the collection went to her daughter, Mrs. Barbara Benoit of Center Harbor, New Hampshire. The Lincoln National Life Foundation purchased the collection from Benoit in 1957. The documents purchased from Benoit included numerous letters and documents that were then merged with other collections owned by the Foundation, depending on the items' type or subject matter. The Nicolay Collection as it now exists comprises only the personal manuscripts, documents, and relics of Helen and John Nicolay.

Scope and Content

The manuscript portion of the Nicolay Collection consists of six series. The *Addresses* series includes notes on addresses Helen Nicolay prepared and gave. Notes on speeches given at Springfield in 1922 and Boston in 1928 as well as notes on a speech given about John Hay are included in this series.

The *Correspondence* series contains Helen Nicolay's correspondence related to her work and other activities. Correspondence also includes letters received from professionals seeking information on topics related to Lincoln.

The *Biographical* series includes early recollections by Helen Nicolay as well as 3 photographs and certificates awarded to her by various organizations.

The *Research* series includes Helen Nicolay's extensive notes on topics such as biographical information on her father and Lincoln's children. This research is reflected in her writings. Among her research materials are the Thomas B. Osborne family correspondence for 1839 through 1843, some in manuscript and some in typescript, and a Helen Nicolay draft incorporating some of those letters. (Osborne was a Representative from Connecticut serving in Congress; the letters were written my Osborne, his wife, and other family members.) Articles about Hay, Lincoln, and John G. Nicolay featured in *Lincoln Lore* and *The Rhode Islander* are also in this series.

The *Writings* series contains Helen Nicolay's written works, including unpublished works and published articles and books. The books section contains early drafts of chapters of *Lincoln's Secretary* as well as revised versions. Reviews and letters about each of her books

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[4] Neely, Jr., 224.
[5] Neely, Jr., 224-225.

were kept in these files by Helen Nicolay. Letters filed here consist mainly of letters written by school children telling her why they read her books and discussing why they enjoyed them. Helen Nicolay often included a copy of her reply with these letters. Writings also includes published and unpublished articles.

The ***John G. Nicolay Collection*** series consists of copies of papers kept by his daughter. The series includes research on his patent for a folding chair, notes on *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* and *Abraham Lincoln, a History*, as well as copies of his personal correspondence from December 21, 1859, to June 1, 1868.

In addition to the manuscript materials, the ***John G. Nicolay Collection*** series also includes:

The book, *The Outbreak of Rebellion,* by John G. Nicolay. This copy, presented to Nicolay by the publisher, was printed in New York by the Charles Scribner Sons Company in 1881. It is a specially bound edition, octavo, in full red morocco.

Three ambrotypes, 3 ferrotypes, 5 cartes-de-visite, a small calendar book, and a small photograph album containing 12 photographs of John G. Nicolay's 1862 trip to Minnesota Territory to negotiate with the Chippewa leader Hole-in-the-Day.

A long, charcoal and white, Scotch-weave blanket shawl given to John G. Nicolay by Abraham Lincoln, who used it during his presidency. Nicolay had his initials, J.G.N., embroidered in red thread at each corner of the shawl. [Held with the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection at the Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis.]

Container List

Box	Folder
1	Addresses
	Addresses of Helen Nicolay
	Speech on John Hay
	Speech at Springfield, Feb. 11, 1922
	Speech at Boston, Feb. 12, 1928
	Notes for talk at Jewish Center, Feb. 1947
	Obituary and notes on Bertha Perrie
	Obituary and notes on Jean Margaret Lander
	Biography
	Early recollections by Helen Nicolay
	Helen Nicolay photographs
	Certificates awarded to Helen Nicolay
	Correspondence
	Letters regarding Helen Nicolay's books
	Letters regarding *Lincoln's Secretary*
	Letters on Edward Bates
2	Correspondence, continued
	Letters regarding Lincoln *Bible*
	Letters regarding Bixby letters
	Miscellaneous letters
	Alphabetized list of correspondence received in regards to Lincoln
	Correspondence A – D
	Correspondence E – A. Griffith
	Correspondence H – M
	Correspondence O – S
	Correspondence T – W
	Research
	Biographical material on John G. Nicolay
	Lincoln Lore and *The Rhode Islander* articles regarding Hay, Lincoln, and Nicolay
	Thomas B. Osborne family letters, manuscript letters, 1841-1842
	Thomas B. Osborne family letters, typescripts/excerpts, 1839-1843
	Helen Nicolay draft incorporating Osborne letters
3	Research, continued
	Springfield, Illinois, notes
	Springfield Farewell notes
	Inauguration Day, 1861
	"Lincoln Likeness"
	Lincoln Children
	Robert Lincoln
	Willie Lincoln
	Tad Lincoln
	Mary Todd Lincoln

Thomas Lincoln (father)
White House Visitors (children)
Elmer Ellsworth
Miscellaneous—Print sources
Helen Nicolay—Miscellaneous Notes
Writings, unpublished
"Lincoln the Artist"
Writings, articles
"Lincoln's Friendliness"
Writings, books
Reviews, letters about *Boy's Life of Abraham Lincoln*
Reviews, letters about *Boy's Life of Grant*
Reviews, letters about *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*
Reviews, letters about *Our Nation in the Building*
Reviews, letters about *Book of American Wars*
Boston City Council reviews of *Book of American Wars*
Reviews, letters about *Boy's Life of Lafayette*
Reviews, letters about *Our Capital on the Potomac*
Notes used in *Children's Lincoln*
Notes for early chapters
Lincoln and the Children, Chapters 1-8
Children's Lincoln, Chapters 1-7
Early and discarded portions of *Children's Lincoln*
White House Attic chapter
Children's Lincoln, Chapters 1-11
Children's Lincoln, Chapters 12-18
Carbon copy, discarded paper from *Children's Lincoln*
Early Form of *Lincoln's Secretary,* Preface, Chapters 1-2
Lincoln's Secretary, Preparation, Chapters 1-2
Lincoln's Secretary, Service I, Chapters 4-7
Lincoln's Secretary, Service II, Chapters 9-13
Lincoln's Secretary, Service III, Chapters 14-18
Lincoln's Secretary, Interim, Chapters 19-21
Lincoln's Secretary, Fulfillment, Chapters 22-25
Lincoln's Secretary, Fulfillment II, Chapters 26-28
Loose paper regarding *Lincoln's Secretary*
Discarded sheets from *Lincoln's Secretary*

4 Writings, books, continued
Nation in the Building/Our Capital on the Potomac, Notes [alphabetical, incomplete]
Adams, Hannah – Adams, Samuel
Advertisements – Arthur, Chester A.
Amusements
Art
Bancroft, Geo. – Boone, Danl.
Booth, J. Wilkes – Busey, Dr. S.C.
Hale, Mrs. Sarah – Hayne

Health – Houston, Saml.
Inaugurations – Irving, Washington
Andrew Jackson
Japanese Embassy – Jay, John
Jefferson, Thos. – Johnson, Richard M.
Paine, Tom. – Political Parties
Polk, Jas. K. – Putnam, Herbert
Railroads – Rutledge, J.
Sampson, Adm. – Sherman, Gen. W.T.
Sigourney – Smithsonian
Social Customs – Surratt
Written but not used in *Capital on the Potomac*
Lincoln Commission of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church/Lincoln Pilgrimage, Washington, D.C. (1970s)
Lincoln—Miscellaneous

5 John G. Nicolay Collection
Notes on *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*
Notes on *Abraham Lincoln, A History*
John G. Nicolay inventions
Letters regarding the Nicolay Papers at the Library of Congress
Letters of John Hay to John Nicolay
Letters regarding Nicolay, Hay at Crystal Park
Nicolay Papers, Dec. 21, 1859 – Dec. 30, 1860
Nicolay Papers, Jan 6, 1861 – May 31, 1861
Nicolay Papers, June 2, 1861 – Dec. 31, 1861
Nicolay Papers, Feb. 2, 1862 – Dec. 7, 1862
Nicolay Papers, Jan. 4, 1863 – Aug. 2, 1863
Nicolay Papers, Feb. 17, 1864 – Dec. 30, 1864
Nicolay Papers, Jan. 6, 1865 – June 1, 1868
Miscellaneous Nicolay papers

6 Cased ambrotypes and ferrotypes; calendar book; photograph album

Emily Fischer, May 2008
Updated by Jane E. Gastineau, July 2014